# "He has given birth to iniquity": Gender and the Reading Subject in MS Harley 603[1]

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One of the most interesting opportunities to study the relationship between word and illustration in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts is provided by the Harley Psalter, the first of three English copies of the early ninth-century Utrecht Psalter, which was made at the abbey of Hautvillers near Rheims and came to England by the late tenth century.[2] The Harley Psalter cannot strictly be called a copy; some of the illustrations are very close to those of the exemplar, but others make significant departures. A number of scholars have occupied themselves with the questions of who read the Harley Psalter, for whom it was made, why it was made, etc.[3] This study addresses the question of *how* it was read: that is, not only identifying probable reading subject types or individuals, but also identifying the relationship between different types of readers and the particular text, speculating about possible problem areas for such readers, and suggesting strategies by which they might have dealt with these problems. It is not necessary to know precisely who read the text; as long as we can propose some reasonable possibilities, we can engage in meaningful speculation about readers and their responses. I am especially interested in the issue of women readers. This may seem like a non-issue for a manuscript that was made by monks and kept in their monastery library. However, I will show that there is at least reason to consider the question seriously. In particular, I believe that women may have read or seen the manuscript, and that it may have even been intended for a particular woman in a position of power; that although it is a highly patriarchal text, both men and women in Anglo-Saxon society (especially monks and nuns) appropriated the Psalms for their own prayers; that this problem is often easy to ignore when reading the verbal text alone, but the illustrated version is much more problematic because of its schematic (formulaic) treatment of people, both men and women, in the illustrations. In fact, the Harley Psalter reveals spirituality as a masculine pursuit; women's roles exist only in relation to men in any given situation. The presence of the pictorial text, in most cases, reinforces the masculine paradigm for reader and spiritual being.

A brief overview of the characteristics of the Harley Psalter manuscript and the place of the Psalms in Anglo-Saxon culture will provide a starting place for dealing with these issues.

**The Manuscript**

BL Ms. Harley 603 is one of the most densely illustrated manuscripts to survive from the Anglo-Saxon period; it provides a wealth of material for studying the dynamic interaction of pictorial and verbal texts.[4] The illustrations as a whole differ from those of the Utrecht Psalter in that they are rendered in color, while those of the Utrecht are drawn in sepia. This style of colored line drawing is an innovation of late Anglo-Saxon England (Gameson 34). Except for a few psalms, the Harley verbal text is the Roman version of the Psalms (the version brought to England by Augustine) rather than the newer Gallican of the exemplar,[5] and the script is minuscule, unlike the rustic capitals of the Utrecht. Many of the illustrations show "modernizing" of individual artifacts, such as weapons, furniture, or architectural features (Carver 117-45). Francis Wormald calls the Harley style less "illusionistic" than the Utrecht style, in its emphasis on pattern over forms.[6] To the twenty-first-century eye, the compositions seem confused and arbitrary, but the spatial structures figure cosmic and human relationships—between God and humanity, people and creation, good and evil, Heaven and Hell. Rather than combining objects or individual figures in a compositional relationship, they combine framed groups of figures, which represent states of being. These structures reflect the temporal condition of the verbal (devotional) text, a spiritual state rather than a movement (narrative) in time. The process of Christianizing the Hebrew text, already begun with the translation into Latin, is carried further in the illustrations, providing what amounts to a Christian gloss featuring heaven, hell, and the martyrdom of saints. Thus the Harley Psalter is a unique text offering a reading informed and structured by its provenance in eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon England.

Scholars disagree on the provenance of the manuscript, but the most commonly held opinion seems to be that it was made at Christ Church, Canterbury.[7] One of the scribes has been identified as Eadui Basan, known for his work on other manuscripts, such as the Eadui Psalter (Noel. 137-40). The verbal text was written by two other scribes in addition to Eadui, and up to ten artists (Noel 21, 207).[8] Much of the past and current criticism of the Harley Psalter which deals with the issue of audience centers around speculation about who the intended

recipient might have been.[9] The answer to this question might provide answers to, or at least insights into other questions as well: for example, why the illustrators deviated in certain ways from the exemplar, why the Psalm text is the Roman rather than the Gallican version, or why an illustrated version was chosen in the first place. However, the intended recipient never owned this manuscript because the illustration cycle is unfinished and it remained at Christ Church. The verbal text was probably complete at one time, but some of the pages appear to have been lost from the end before binding, so that the last psalm is now 143 (Backhouse "Harley Psalter" 58). Psalms 68 through 99 have spaces for illustrations, and 67 has only a faint drawing. The Psalter was begun during the early eleventh century, and the latest illustrations were done in the early twelfth century.

While we can only speculate about who the intended audience might have been, we know, since it was never finished, that the actual audience was other than its intended one. The manuscript would have remained in the monastery scriptorium and later the library, where it could have been used by the monks of Christ Church as well as visitors from other monastic houses and perhaps even the occasional educated lay reader. The monastery may also have lent it to other houses of monks or nuns. There is ample evidence that nunneries had scriptoria and produced manuscripts.[9] It is not unreasonable to suggest that there might have been an exchange of manuscripts and information among them and scriptoria of houses of monks. The audience may then have included a variety of reader types including monastic and lay, male and female readers. Ways of interacting with the text would also have varied considerably. Especially problematic is the question of how women would have read and viewed this text whose androcentric bias is compounded by the schematic treatment of people, both men and women, in the illustrations. The ways in which such schemata are used in a manuscript reveal attitudes about people as members of groups, or as those who fulfill certain functions in society. Their coded nature suggests an assumption on the part of the illustrator that the codes will be read in a certain way. While we can assume a very general common cultural framework among readers, there would have been multiple variations on this framework. Reaction to illustrations of royalty, women, demons, or other schematic types was at least that of recognition. But reaction to the concepts they represent, to the particular form of the schema, and

to the configurations in which they participate would be different for each reader.

**The Psalms in Anglo-Saxon Life**

The Psalms were of primary importance in the liturgy of the medieval church, and as Andrew Hughes points out, liturgical practice affected everyone:

> Education began with the Psalter, and readings and chants were carried into daily life to inspire love songs and epics: computation, formula, and calculation derive from work with problems of the calendar. From the need to explain and summarize the increasing complexity of the services, the principles of organization, abstraction, and generalization were worked out. Whether cloistered or not, man ordered his day by the services and the church bell signaling them, and his year by the succession of church feasts, and he examined all his actions and related them to his religion. (Hughes xxi)

Hughes writes of the medieval period as a whole, but his claims are particularly true of the early medieval period before the use of mechanical clocks became common. And for those in the religious houses which produced books like the Harley Psalter, the liturgy provided the substance of existence. It cannot be overemphasized how much the Psalms were a part of the fiber of daily life for monks and nuns. They formed the basis for the daily office, which completes a circuit of the whole Psalter in a week. All monks and nuns, both literate and non-literate, would have memorized the Psalter. In addition, psalms were recited at other times throughout the day. Over 100 psalms would be recited in a typical day (although many of them would have been repetitions). The secular office (that followed in non-monastic churches) also used the Psalter as a vehicle for prayer, but fewer of the psalms were recited.[11] Psalms had other functions as well. The chanting of psalms for the royal house was a practice peculiar to Anglo-Saxon England (Roper 30), at least partially a result of King Edgar's involvement in the tenth-century monastic revival. Barbara Raw likens the psalter illustrations to church paintings the function of which is devotional:

> [These paintings] served the faculties of understanding and of will as well as that of memory, first by causing those who

> saw them to reflect on the significance of what was remembered and secondly by inviting a response of faith or love. The decoration of Anglo-Saxon psalters functions in a similar way though it lays greater stress on the operation of the second faculty of the soul, the understanding, as might be expected in a prophetic text. (Raw 31)

Alongside these visual aids to understanding were commentaries on the Psalter such as those by Augustine and Cassiodorus. The Psalter was the primary text for learning to read, and the most often used for private devotions and for acts of penitence (Openshaw 17-25).

**The Harley Psalter and its Possible Readers**

The version of the Psalms used in the Harley Psalter, the Roman version, is older than the Gallican, having been brought to England by Augustine. The Gallican version was at this time in use at Winchester, but the Roman version continued longer at Christ Church (Sisam and Sisam 49). Noel sees in the choice of different translations, an indication that the Harley Psalter was conceived as a very different text, not as a copy of the Utrecht (10). The Harley Psalter is in some ways more "modern" than the Utrecht, which, according to Gameson, "was designed to emulate the appearance of an antique book" (3), but in other ways more traditional. In addition to the more traditional verbal text, the illustrations retain some of the classical iconography of the Utrecht. However, the manuscript is more "modern" in appearance because of its minuscule script. Speculation that the psalter might have been made for Archbishop Æthelnoth focuses on the initial at the beginning of Psalm 1 which shows an archbishop prostrate at the feet of Christ.[12] Noel believes that it was intended for use by someone who already knew the Psalms and wanted to study the illustrations (201). Backhouse suggests that the beatus initial may date from 1020 when Æthelnoth of Christ Church was consecrated as Archbishop of Canterbury (109), and Noel confirms that the image of the archbishop is a late addition (280). However, many similar examples from the period picture donors or producers of manuscripts, rather than recipients.[13] It is perhaps equally likely that the archbishop was involved with production of the manuscript, or intended giving it to someone.

Those who did read the manuscript did not all do so for the same reasons. Any reader approaches a text with certain expectations and

intentions. These expectations and intentions meet and interact with the attributes of the text itself, which are in turn the product of the writer's and illustrator's ideas, cultural milieu, and any number of other factors. Possible reader intentions may have been devotional reading, memorization, or contemplation of the interpretation provided by the illustrations. The primary use, however, was probably devotional, a vehicle for private, individual worship. The Psalter was not merely read or recited, but appropriated by the reader for his or her own prayers. The reader *became* the psalmist, as Cassiodorus argues in his *Explanation of the Psalms* where he quotes Bishop Athanasius on the subject:

> Quicumque psalmi uerba recitat, quasi propria uerba decantat et tamquam a semetipso conscripta unus psallit et non temquam alio dicente, aut de alio significante sumit et legit; sed tamquam ipse de semetipso loquens, sic huiusmode uerba profert et qualia sunt quae dicuntur talia relut ipse agens, ex semetipso loquens, Deo uidetur offerre sermones. (97.22)[14]

Most approaches to reading illustrated manuscripts assume a verbal bias, that is, that the illustrations are subordinate to the verbal text and exist to clarify or comment on it. While this assumption may have some validity, it is not the only possible reading. Although the pre-existence of the biblical material might seem to guarantee it preeminence to the illustrations, some elements of the pictorial text are also pre-existing, having been borrowed from classical iconographic models. We could read the illustration material as an opaque text made transparent by the explanatory, subordinate verbal text. The most productive reading, however, is one that sees the two as interactive texts which comment reciprocally. As we shall see, an interactive reading of this particular Psalter produces an experience of reading that is problematic for women readers.

This manuscript typifies the Anglo-Saxon penchant for conceptual rather than perceptual illustration (see Raw 2-13, 26-27), and that mode of representing is in keeping with its intensely devotional nature. The schematization already mentioned is one of the most obvious characteristics of the manuscript. As we shall see, the over all schematic plan is highly androcentric. Figure 1 shows typical examples of schematic types for (a) God, (b) king, (c) women and children, (d) soldier, and (e) psalmist.[15] The schemata for "man" and "psalmist" are almost identical. The "man" schema is less consistent

a: f. 50r b: f. 28v c: f. 7v

d: f. 11r e: f. 6v

*Figure 1*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603.
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than the others, varying between the long robe of Figure 1 and a knee-length tunic reflecting contemporary Anglo-Saxon dress. For general references to people of undetermined gender, the illustrators use the male schema which seems to function as a default. Women are not default characters; they are not usually represented in the illustrations unless specific mention is made of them in the text. Therefore, they are less likely to adhere to the schematic model than are the other figures but are particularized to reflect the situation.

**Psalm 33**

A close look at some of the individual psalms will show how the illustrations combine with the verbal text to emphasize or refigure its meanings in terms of cosmic structures and the human condition as it is realized in the default (male) human being. Psalm 33 (Figure 2) is a praise psalm whose illustration is fairly typical of those that

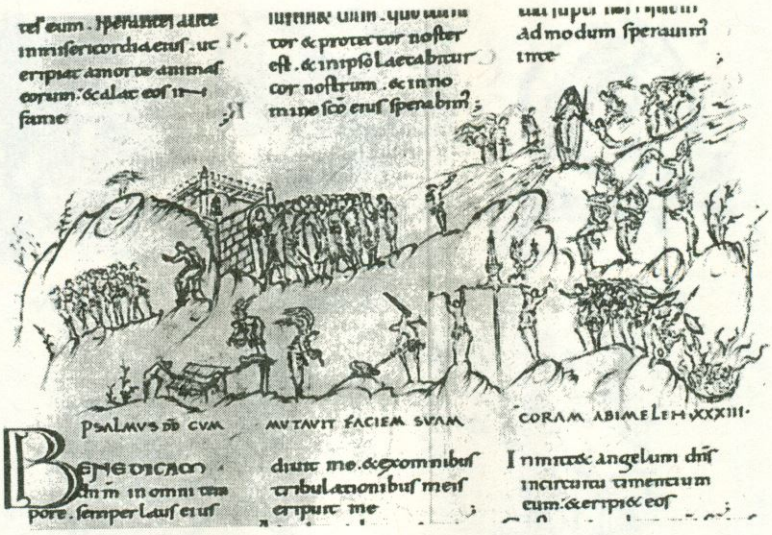


*Figure 2: f. 19r*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603.
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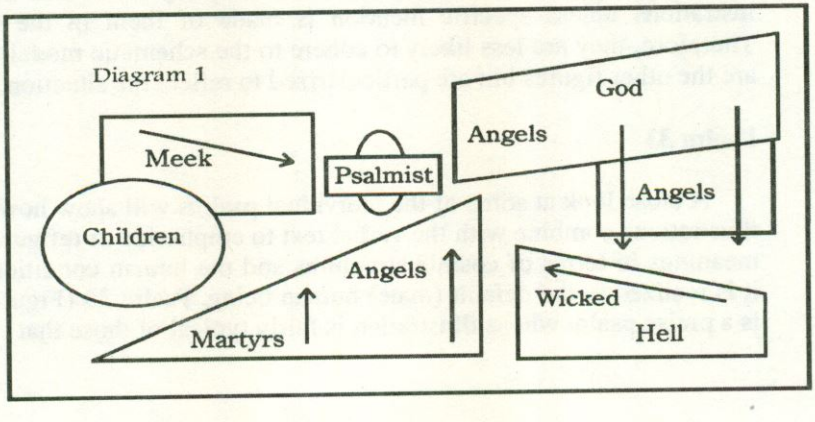
closely follow the exemplar. It is constituted of elements that are related to specific phrases in the verbal text.

These elements are made up of highly schematized figures and objects, and separated by baselines indicating geographical features. Below is a diagram of the illustration for Psalm 33. The picture is divided into four general divisions: the meek and children at the upper left, God and angels at the upper right, the wicked falling into a hell pit at the lower right, and three saints being martyred at the



lower left. In his commentary on the Psalms, Cassiodorus divides this psalm into four parts whose themes are: blessing and praise (verses 3 and 4), conversion and reward (verses 6 and 12), warning against sin (verse 17), and the deliverance of the just (verses 10 and 23)(325). The compositional elements appear to correspond in a gen eral way to these four parts: blessing and praise to the scene where God is flanked by seven angels who are turned to face him, and the meek, guided by the psalmist, look toward heaven; conversion and reward to the group of children whom the psalmist instructs; warning against sin to the group of wicked people falling into the pit; and deliverance of the just to the depiction of the martyrdom of three saints, Peter (reverse crucifixion), Paul (beheading), and Lawrence (roasted on a grill), for whose souls three angels wait with draped hands.

The picture space, typical for Harley 603 illustration layouts, is divided by diagonal lines formed by the base lines and the shapes of the groups, particularly the ascending height of the martyred saints. Lawrence is the lowest at the left, and St. Peter on his cross pushes into the upper regions and points to heaven. The psalmist stands at the crux of the composition. The central position of the psalmist reflects the language of the verbal text and the conceptual nature of the illustration. In a hypothetical reading, the reader/viewer is projected into the picture space by identification with the (male) psalmist (David) who speaks in the first person. Use of the first person is typical of the Psalms, and is one of the characteristics which make the book so useful for devotional purposes. The illustrations, by focusing on the figure of the psalmist, provide evidence that the psalter functions to provide an individualistic, personal approach to the Psalms rather than a collective (liturgical) one. The reader becomes the one who blesses the Lord at all times (verse 1) and who has sought the Lord for help from troubles (verse 5); but this particular psalm also uses the second person to the same effect. The psalmist commands the readers, "Magnificate D[omi]n[u]m mecum & exaltemus nomen eius in invicem" (verse 3), and "Gustate & videte quo [niam] suavis est D[omi]n[u]s" (verse 9).[16] Cassiodorus connects this last phrase with the Eucharist; the sacrament is prefigured in the Old Testament.

An awareness of this connection further involves the reader/viewer with the groups represented in the visual and verbal text, but with an added dimension. The depiction of time is different in this kind of text than in a narrative. In its representation of states of be-

ing, all parts of the picture space exist simultaneously. The Latin text uses verbs in the future, present, and perfect tenses, and in indicative, imperative, and subjunctive moods, to express a timeless state of God's trustworthiness, a timelessness which is inclusive for the reader's present.

Although the terms of the psalm refer to people of both genders (the wicked, the righteous, etc.), all of the actors in this scene are male. Because no women are specifically mentioned in the verbal text, only default schemata are employed where gender is ambiguous. This is typical of the Harley illustrations generally, although we will examine some illustrations which depict women. Their presence, as well as the presence of any other figure that deviates from the default schema, usually has marked significance.

**Psalm 113**

Psalm 113 differs from Psalm 33 in several ways. Its illustration deviates from the exemplar: it is simpler, and its emphasis is different. The theme of this psalm is God's help and protection for his people. The theme is supported in two ways: first by the remembrance of deliverance from Egypt, and second by comparing God with the "simulacra gentiu[m]" (verse 12).[17] The illustration concentrates on the first of these (Figure 3 below):

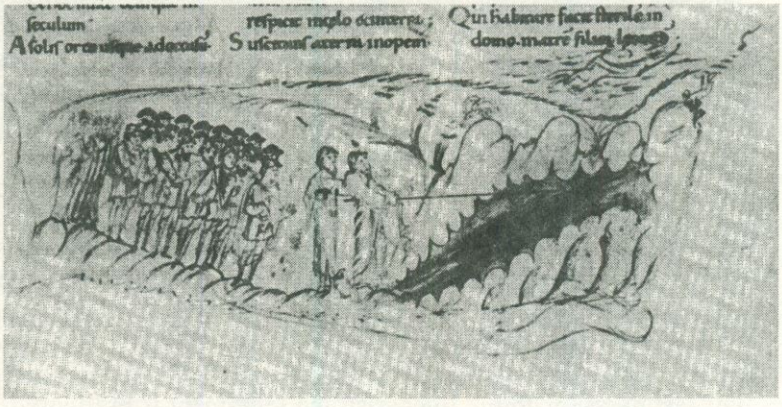


*Figure 3: f. 58r*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603
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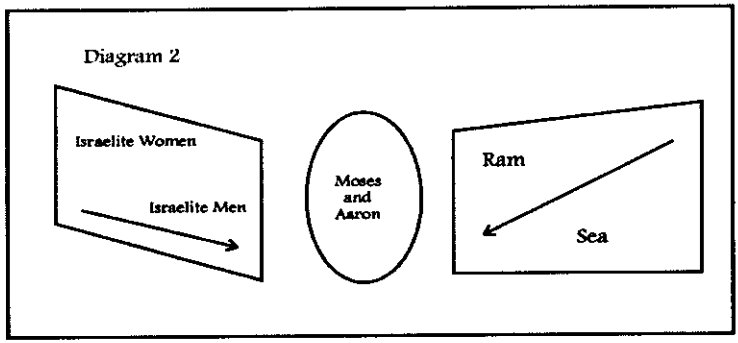
The Utrecht illustration has the same emphasis, but depicts more aspects of the exodus, including a city from which the Israelites exit, work being done on the city walls (presumably by Israelite slaves), and a procession with the ark. It also illustrates verse 24 with coffins and a Hell pit: "Non mortui laudeunt te, D[omi]ne neq[ue] om[ne]s qui descendunt in infernum."[18] The Harley illustration shows only the Israelites about to cross the Red Sea. Moses and Aaron are central in this illustration. The diagonal lines of the sea and the group of




people point to them. Attention is concentrated on Moses's staff, which is about to cause the sea to part. People are hierarchized by their position on the page. Moses is the primary figure farthest to the right. Aaron stands to the left of Moses, next the Israelite men, and last the Israelite women, so that although the women function in a generalized way, their graphic position emphasizes their social position. The group of women as a generalized schema is unique in the Harley Psalter, and calls attention to their absence otherwise. Also less typical is the use of the third person. Although it is one of the few Psalms with narrative content, it has, however, one of the most static illustrations in the Psalter. But, as with Psalm 33, the purpose of this narrative is not to tell a story, but to express a state of being. Because of the events of the Exodus, those who believe themselves to be God's people are able to live in a state of trust. Therefore, the illustrated event becomes, as Mieke Bal explains, a synecdoche for a whole series of events (70, 81). The reader is invited to participate in the event itself, not as a series of actions, but as a state of being delivered from troubles. The hand of God reaching down from the sky represents this state of his continual involvement with humanity.

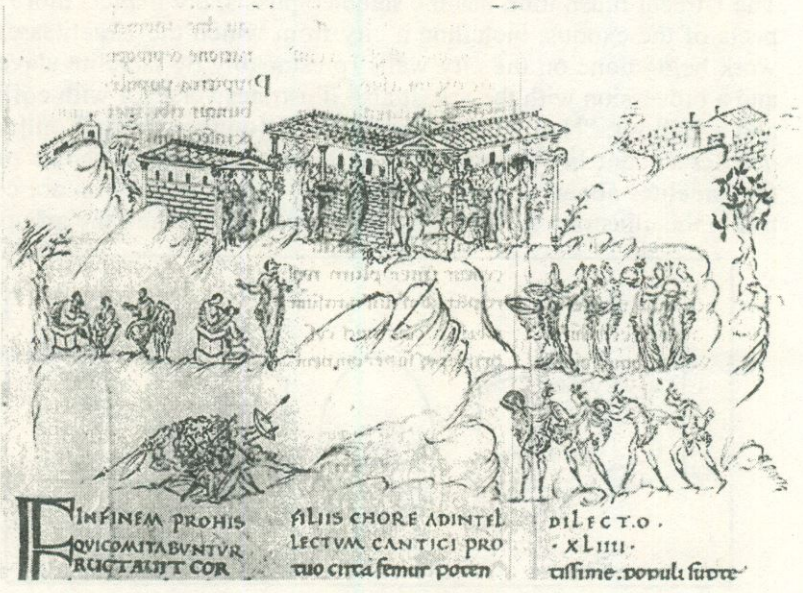



*Figure 4: f. 26r*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603.
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**Schematization and the Representation of Women**

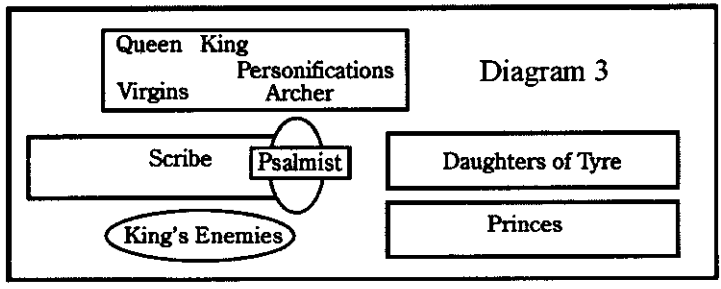
Representations of women are marked by their deviation from the default schema. There are several predominant types of women in the Harley Psalter: personifications, women as victims of wicked male characters, women as nursing or nurturing mothers, and women as authority figures. There are also women as daughters representing a nation paying tribute (in Psalm 44) and one female demon.

Psalm 44 (Figure 4) has more women in more different roles than any other psalm, in both the verbal and pictorial texts. The psalm is a love song for the wedding of a king. It begins with praise of the beauty and strength of the king, who is shown in front of his palace wearing a sword and trampling a demon underfoot (verse 6: "populi sub te cadent").[19] The psalmist praises the king's virtues: "intende prospere procede et regne. Propter veritatem & mansuetudinem & justitiam & deducet te mirabiliter dextera tua" (verse 6).[20] The virtues Truth, Gentleness, and Justice are depicted as personification figures to the right, in front of the palace. Some factor, per-

haps the example of classical iconography, has influenced the Utrecht illustrator to make these figures female despite the default male schema. Abstract nouns in Latin are usually gendered female, and are represented as females in classical art. But these nouns are also feminine in Old English (*soþnes, eaþnes* and *rihtnes)*; so the gender of the figure in the Utrecht is reinforced and reproduced by the gender of the Old English.[21] Verses 10-16 refer to the queen and her female retainers:

te delectaverunt filiae regum in honore tuo
Adstitit regina a dextris tuis in vestitu de aurato
circumamicta varietate
Audi filia & uide & inclina aurem tuam
& obliviscere populum tuum & domu[m] patris tui
Quo[niam] concupivit rex specie[m] tuam quia ipse est
d[omi]n[u]stuus & adorabunt eum
filiæ Tyri in muneribus
Uultum tuum deprecabuntur omnes divites plebis
omnis gloria eius filiæ regum ab intus
In fimbriis aureis circumamicta varietate
Adducentur regi virgines post ea[m] proximæ eius
afferentur tibi
in lætitia & exultatione adducentur in templum regis.[22]

The queen is shown to the left of the king, wearing a crown, and accompanied by another woman who holds a box. She is in "gilded clothing surrounded with colored attire" (verse 10 above) and "within golden borders clothed round about with colored attire" (verse 14 above). The queen's robe in the illustration has a decorative pattern. She is encouraged to forget her father's house now that she is the bride of the king. More women, perhaps the virgins of



verse 15 stand in another part of the building to the far left. Below the personifications, the daughters of Tyre bring gifts, and below them princes. The queen, her retainers, and the personifications are in the highest register of the illustration. The daughters of Tyre are above the princes. The queen is one of several female authority figures depicted in the Harley Psalter. Cassiodorus explains that Christians understand this psalm in the same way that they understand the Song of Songs, that is, that the bridegroom is Christ and the bride is the church. The gold of her garments is love and the colors of her garments are the many tongues spoken by Christians (439). She is the only figure firmly identified as a queen in any of the Harley illustrations.

Another example of a female authority figure is in Psalm 122 (Figure 5). The verbal text says: "Ecce sicut oculi servoru[m] in manibus dominoru[m] suorum Et sicut oculi ancillæ in manibus d [omi]næsuæ, ita oculi n[ost]ri ad d[omi]n[u]m d[eu]m n[ost]r[u]m donec misereatur nobis" (verse 2).[23] The three situations proposed in the psalm are presented side by side in the illustration. To the left are the master and his servant, then the mistress and her servant. Each is placed in an architectural frame. The master and mistress sit in identical positions, showing the parallelism of the phrases. In the center of the picture (not visible in the figure), the psalmist, who is being hooked by a demon, reaches up to take a spear that God hands him.

*Figure 5: 65r* *Figure 6: 67v*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603.
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Schematically, this mistress is very similar to the woman in Psalm 130 (Figure 6), who gives a ring to a young man. This scene

depicts verse 4, "Sicut ablactatus est sup[er] matre[m] sua[m] ita retribues in animam meam."[24] The Utrecht illustration shows an infant here. Judith Duffy believes that the woman giving the ring may represent Queen Emma and one of her sons, perhaps Harthacnut, and that the ring-giving represents some kind of ceremonial or legal act, perhaps signifying Harthacnut's departure for Denmark (162-67). Neither figure wears a crown as does the queen in Psalm 44, but hers may be an illustration of the verbal reference to gold, or a stronger (metonymic) indication of royalty because of her identification with the church.

Another psalm illustration believed by Duffy to represent Queen Emma is that of Psalm 132 (Figure 7). The psalm opens, "Ecce quam bonum & quam iocundum habitare fratres in unum" (verse 1).[25] The Utrecht illustration has a group of cowled men, probably meant to be monks, sitting together on a bench. The Harley illustrator has made one

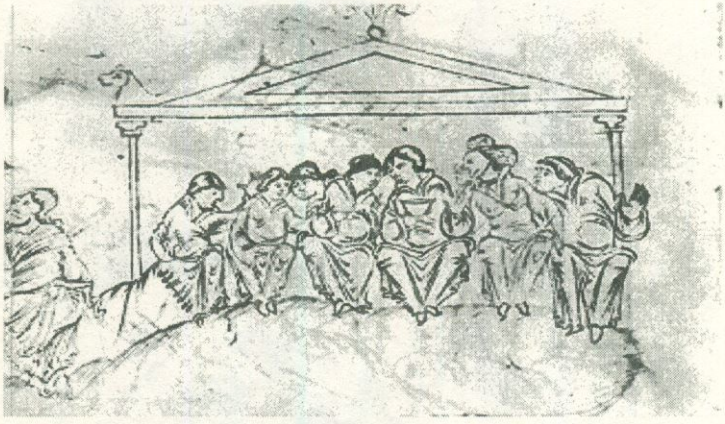

*Figure 7: f. 68v*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603.
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of them a woman. She wears a headdress and sits next to a central figure who holds a chalice. Duffy's premise is that Emma is included with the "brothers" because of her patronage of the monastery which produced the manuscript (168-69).

Women as victims appear in several of the Harley illustrations. One is Psalm 13, which begins with a complaint about the corruption of humanity. At the lower left, two men attempt to saw a woman in

half (the saw is a bar in the Utrecht illustration) (Figure 8). At the right a group of women with children, pursued by horsemen, climbs a hill toward a soldier who holds his hand to them. Attacks upon women and children may be an indication of the depth of the corruption of those the psalmist describes. Psalm 108 (Figure 9) shows another female victim, the woman at the bottom center of the illustration. Half-naked, she tears at her hair and clothing. The psalmist curses those wicked and deceitful men who have oppressed him: "[Fi]ant filii eius orfani & uxor eius vidua" (verse 9).[26] Next to the hill on which the grieving widow kneels, three naked children reach up to her.

*Figure 8: f. 7v*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603.
By permission of the British Library)

*Figure 9: f. 56r*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603.
By permission of the British Library)

The role of woman as nurturer can be seen in Psalm 21. A lament seen as a reference to Christ's passion, it contains the lines,

"diviserunt sibi vestimenta mea et super vestem meam miserunt sortem" (verse 19).[27] The psalmist lists his afflictions; he stands in a coffin at the right, surrounded by depictions of his sufferings which are metaphorized in the verbal text as attacking dogs, lions, and unicorns (verses 21-22). The illustration includes a cross, a device for casting lots, two men fighting over a garment, and a woman with bare breasts seated in a chair (Figure 10). Verse 10 says, "Quoniam tu es qui abtraxisti me de ventre spes mea ab uberibus matris meæ."[28] She appears as an attribute of the psalmist, a womb and breasts representing the beginning of his life. At the lower left (not visible in the figure) are several women with babies, illustrating per

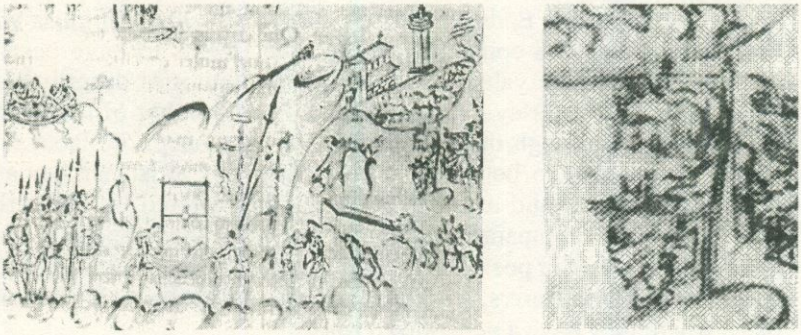


*Figure 10 with detail: f. 12r*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603.
By permission of the British Library)

haps "Timeat eum omne semen Israhel" (verse 25).[29] Offspring are indicated verbally by the masculine seed, but depicted in the illustration as nursing infants with their mothers.

Psalm 7 presents a variation on the schema of nursing mother whose interpretation in terms of gender seems to be confused and ambiguous. In Figure 11 a female demon is nursing three babies.This picture illustrates verse 15, which says: "ecce parturiit iniustitiam & concepit dolorem & peperit iniquitatem."[30] Latin verbs do not differentiate between masculine and feminine, but the pronouns in verses 16 and 17 which refer to this same person are masculine. The Utrecht Psalter illustration has a male demon; and indeed, the Hebrew uses male verb forms, although the three verbs *habel, harah*, and *yalad*, connote the same female activities that the modern English terms do (as do the Latin words, *concepit* and *parturit*. The Latin *peperit* can also mean beget). Another psalter which uses the Utrecht

*Figure 11: f. 4r*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603.
By permission of the British Library)

as an exemplar, the Eadwine Psalter, has an Old English gloss with the pronoun he. The common reading then, seems to have been to use the default male value, even though the activities described are female. Only the Harley Psalter illustrator has thought of the person as a woman. Although the metaphoric use of conception, labor, and birth is applicable to both men and women, this artist has deviated from his exemplar and avoided the ambiguity offered by the verbal text. Thus, in the comparatively few places where they appear, women are depicted either in positions of authority (identified with the queen) or as victims or nurturers, with the exception of Psalm 113—the only place where they have a generalized role.

Most schematized people are indistinguishable members of categories, functioning to represent a concept as well as to form a compositional unit. In these illustrations, the default male person corresponds in a way to the use of generic "man" in present-day English.[31] Unlike the psalmist, these groups do not provide much with which a reader could identify. Male readers could have placed themselves in the center of the scene with the male psalmist. As Patrocinio Schweickart puts it,

> For the male reader, the text serves as the meeting ground of the personal and the universal. Whether or not the text approximates the particularities of his own experience, he is invited to validate the equation of maleness with humanity. The male reader feels his affinity with the universal, with the paradigmatic human being, precisely because he is male. (41)

For a woman reader, the process is more complex. Three possibilities present themselves. Either the female reader could identify

herself with the less gender-specific verbal text[32] but not the illustration, or she could regender herself as male so as to identify with the pictured psalmist figure, or she could mentally undo the male subject in the center of the page and replace him with a subject more like herself. Any of these strategies results in either partial alienation from the text or a double operation of reading. Recent feminist criticism supports the contention that most women have learned to read as men. Judith Fetterly's term for the process of the male gendering of the female reader is immasculation: "The cultural reality is not the emasculation of men by women, but the *immasculation* of women by men. As readers, teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values." Schweickart comments: "The process of immasculation is latent in the text, but finds its actualization only through the reader's activity. In effect, the woman reader is the agent of her own immasculation" (49). Writing about the issues of female sexuality in the Middle Ages, Shari Horner claims that:

> medieval literary theory correlates "good" reading, that is, spiritual reading of an allegorical text, with masculinity. Texts themselves are figured female; the masculine reader must penetrate the literal text to access its spiritual truth. Perhaps the poem's readerly pleasure, then, lies in its construction of a *masculine* reader, one who reads allegorically—that is, spiritually—and thus derives pleasure from the text. In medieval theories of reading, the act of interpretation was perceived as pleasurable because this act enabled readers to "master" the text in question. Reading spiritually allowed female readers to assume a masculine perspective, a gender position outside of the one that placed them in both physical and spiritual danger. (62)

Evidence that medieval women were expected to adapt themselves to male texts is found in Héloïse's complaint about the Benedictine Rule: "At present the one Rule of Saint Benedict is professed in the Latin church by women equally with men, although, as it was clearly written for men alone, it can only be obeyed by men, whether subordinates or superiors"(160). If women were expected to adapt to an androcentric text where physical differences need to be considered, how much more so for those where this is not a consideration.

In addition, the female reader faces further limitations in connecting with actual depictions of women, because the number of roles is so limited.

Moreover, often these roles exist only in relation to the men in the situation: the woman victim shows the depravity of her male oppressor, the nurturing mother nurses male children, the queen's function is that of consort to the king. The presence of the pictorial text, in most cases, alters the dynamics of reading much more significantly for a female reader than it does for a male reader.

An illustration which presents a more ambiguous picture of gender is the frontispiece. This illustration of the Trinity (Figure 12) is

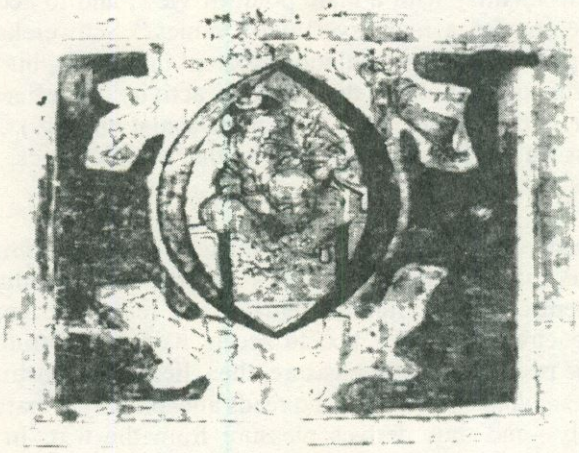


*Figure 12: f 1r*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603.
By permission of the British Library)

not found in the Utrecht Psalter. The schematic pose is that of a nursing mother, but God, not Mary, holds the child Jesus. He presses his face against the child's so that they seem to mirror one another, a metaphoric representation of the spiritual likeness (oneness) of the Father and Son. The head of the dove, which represents the Holy Spirit, is juxtaposed against the other two. This illustration is by Wormald's hand B. This is a different artist from the one who made the illustration of the female demon. This artist has conflated two

schemata to produce an image that crosses gender boundaries. In this case the persona remains male, but the schematic pose is female. Two concepts with their cultural associations interact on the page. There is no direct correlation between pictorial and verbal texts here; the frontispiece acts as an introduction to the Psalter as a whole without illustrating any specific material. The Bible contains some mother imagery for God, and Carolyn Walker Bynum's well-known work *Jesus as Mother* traces the increase in popularity of this image in the twelfth- and thirteenth-centuries. This illustration gives evidence that this trope was present in the early medieval period as well. It serves to mitigate, in a small way, the predominantly patriarchal nature of the rest of the manuscript and to distance it somewhat from its exemplar.

**The Political Nature of the Psalter**

Psalters in England had certain political connotations because of the connection between the monasteries and the kingship, and these political aspects had meaning for women readers. As mentioned above, Edgar's role in the monastic revival of the tenth century was a major one, and his queen, Ælfþrið, also participated. The monasteries had been devastated by the Viking invasions, and many houses had ceased to function as a result. The revival saw the founding of many new establishments, especially in the southeast. One chronicler writes:

> hwa is monna on angelcynne wuniende þ[æt] nyte hu he godes rice. þ[æt] is godes cyricean. ægþer ge mid gastlicum gode. ge mid woroldcundum eallum mæge fyrþrode 7 friþode. æfter þam þe he sylf geriht wearð. began georne mynstera wide geond his cynerice to rihtlæcynne. 7 godes þeowdom to arærenne. An sumum stowum eac swilce he mynecæna gestaþolode and þa Æ[l]fþriþe his gebeddan betæhte. Þ[æt] heo æt ælcere neode hyra gehulpe. He sylf wæs a smeagende ymb muneca gesundfulnesse. 7 wel willende hi to þam myngode þ[æt] heo hine geefenlæcende on þa ilcan wisan ymbe mynecæne hogode. ("Edgar Establishes Monasteries" 440)[33]

The intertwining of church and state was profound. The king, on the one hand, had sovereign power over the monasteries (the queen seems to have some power, although how much is not clear). Abbots

and abbesses, on the other hand, were guaranteed access to the king. Archbishops and close advisors to the king were often monks. The practice of saying daily prayers, psalms, and masses for the royal house was one of the unique characteristics of the English version of Benedictine liturgy. It would not be surprising if Queen Emma were indeed pictured in the psalm illustrations; however, the connection may be even stronger. Other illustrations may also have specific reference to the royal house. Psalm 112 shows four kings. Duffy believes that one is Cnut and the others are his subordinates (162-63). Illustrations which follow the Utrecht Psalter closely take on new meaning when placed in an English context. Psalm 19 is a kingship psalm, whose purpose is to ask God's blessing on the king of Israel. Christians have interpreted these psalms as Christ/Messiah psalms, but this one was among those said daily in Anglo-Saxon Benedictine houses for the king of England. In Figure 13 we see the king present-

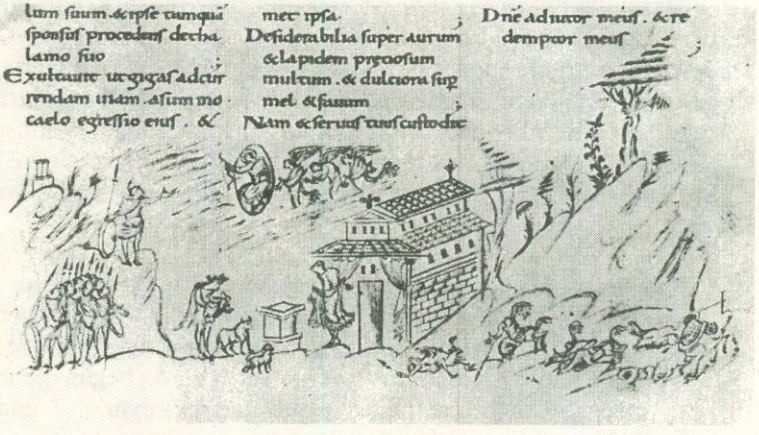
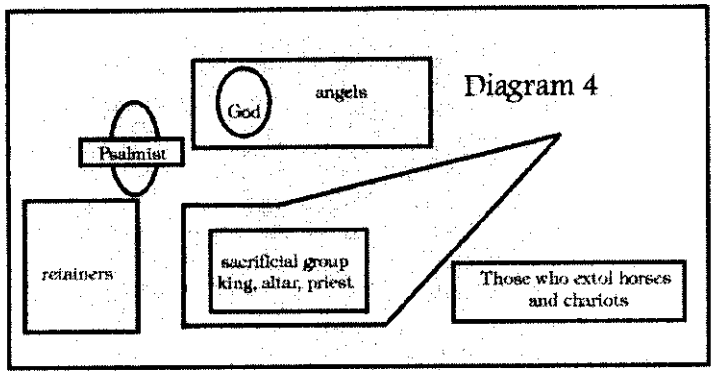



*Figure 13: f. 11r*
(*The Harley Psalter*, BL Ms. Harley 603.
By permission of the British Library)

ing sacrificial animals at a temple. The illustration is a close copy of the Utrecht picture. De Wald identifies the crowned figure as another version of the psalmist, but I see no indication that it represents anyone other than the king. The psalmist prays on behalf of the king: "Memor sit d[omi]n[u]s omnis sacrificii tui & holocaustum tuum pingue fiat" (verse 4),[34] and in verse 9 he says, "D[omi]ne saluum




fac regem."[35] Whether the makers of the Utrecht Psalter would have seen the crowned figure as a temporal king or Christ, the fact that in England this psalm was recited on behalf of the king would have determined that at least monastic readers or illustrators saw him as the king of England. The soldiers at the far left seem to be the king's retainers, balancing the group of men falling from their horses on the far right.

Together they represent verses 8 and 9: "Hi in curribus et hi in equis nos autem in nomine d[omi]ni d[e]i n[ost]ri magnificabimus; ipsi obligati sunt & ceciderunt; nos vero surreximus & erecti sumus."[36] The psalmist, standing on a hill, represents those who are standing upright. Schematically, he is like the other soldiers, except that he has a shield and stands apart. The reader/viewer is again interjected into the psalm by the 'we' of verse 8, and included with the king's retainers by the illustration (with the obvious problems for the female reader). The cultural conditions change the reception of the psalm. They do not erase the interpretation of Christ as the king, but they shift the emphasis. Duffy, describing the inventive illustrations of hand F, writes:

> While it can never be certain that definite references were intended, it seems apparent that at the forefront of the concerns of the designer of these unique images were the issues of relationships among royalty, within the royal family itself, seen in a milieu of newly powerful monastic institutions, interpreted in terms of symbolic ceremonial form. (173)

If these references to royalty are as specific as Duffy claims, perhaps, Emma herself, as Rolf Hasler suggests, was the intended re-

cipient of this manuscript. According to T.A. Heslop, both Cnut and Emma were generous patrons of monastic houses, who often ordered the production of lavish books as gifts. Heslop provides a list of Cnut and Emma's gifts to monastic houses including the arm of St. Bartholomew, golden altar vessels, vestments, and gospels given by Emma herself to Christ Church Canterbury (158-61). At least one instance where Emma was the recipient of a gift psalter is recorded in the *Vita S. Wulfstani*.[37] If Duffy is correct in identifying the female figures of Psalms 122, 132, and 139 as Emma, then a new reader position suggests itself—the position of a woman of power and influence whose good will and continued support is being courted. Despite the general androcentric bias (a legacy from the exemplar and perhaps the original intentions of the producers who began the work before Emma became queen), the female reader, Emma, would be projected into the text in specific roles, not only as the psalmist, but as a kind of ever-present benign authority figure.

The basic androcentricity of the exemplar receives a partial reworking in the Harley version. This may reflect a more receptive attitude toward women in the Anglo-Saxon culture, or it may be an attempt to influence Emma's dealings with the monastic community.

Archbishop Æthelnoth, according to William of Malmesbury, was a close personal friend of Cnut and his private chaplain (Duffy 171). If he is indeed the donor figure of the Beatus initial, it is possible that he could have directed that the manuscript, whose production was already underway at the very scriptorium where he was formerly dean, be finished for presentation to the queen. The possibility of Emma as the recipient is speculation, but for the purpose of considering possible reading subjects, we need do no more than show a reasonable possibility to add another dimension to the dynamics of the role of the reader. If a woman must read as a divided subject, how much more this would be true for a female subject who is specifically depicted in the illustrations. Not only would Emma place herself in the role of the psalmist, negotiating the relationship between her female self and the male characters in the illustrations, but she must also encompass the representations of herself as female authority figure.

I do not suggest that Anglo-Saxon women were aware of or resentful of the kinds of operations that were required of them in reading androcentric illustrated manuscripts. Even with the Harley Psalter, which is more androcentric than many other Anglo-Saxon texts, the bias (borrowed from the Utrecht Psalter along with many of its

other characteristics) was probably not considered remarkable. Genre is probably also a contributing factor. The Psalms refer less often to individuals than to characterized groups—the just, the righteous, the wicked, and so on. The response of illustrators in a patriarchal culture to such generalization is to employ the most generalized schemata available, the default male. In fact, the result of adding illustrations to any text is to situate the text more specifically in a particular culture, time, and place. Issues, such as gender, which might remain ambiguous in a manuscript with text only are forced to reveal cultural positions and biases. In patriarchal cultures, attempts at universalization usually turn out to privilege the male perspective. At the same time, illustrations which seek to provide more particular information also engage and reveal the same kinds of bias. While the practice of emphasizing the patriarchal through illustration has its disadvantages for the female reader, it may have made women more flexible as readers than their male counterparts.

*Tuskegee University*

## Notes

[1] This article in a slightly different form appears as part of chapter three, *Fair and Varied Forms: Visual Textuality in Medieval Illustrated Manuscripts* (Routledge 2002) and is used by permission.

[2] See E.T. De Wald, *The Illustrations of the Utrecht Psalter* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1933). See also Francis Wormald, "The Utrecht Psalter," *Collected Writings*, Vol. 1. *Studies in Medieval Art from the Sixth to the Twelfth Centuries*, ed. J.J.G. Alexander, T.F. Brown, and Joan Gibbs (London: Oxford UP, 1984) 36-45.

[3] See especially William Noel, *The Harley Psalter* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 196-202; Janet Backhouse, "The Making of the Harley Psalter," *The British Library Journal* 10 (1994): 97-113.

[4] I use the term text to refer to both verbal and pictorial modes of representation. I am operating on the assumption that readers process both kinds of material in the same way.

[5] Psalms 100-105.24a follow the Gallican version, and coincide with the work of a particular scribe (See Judith Duffy, "The Inventive Group of Illustrations in the Harley Psalter," Diss. (U of California Berkeley, 1997) 3, 236.

[6] Francis Wormald, *English Drawings of the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London: Faber, 1952) 31.

[7] See William Noel, *The Harley Psalter* for a discussion of opinions on date and provenance (3 and 6).

[8] Noel gives the most detailed analysis of the construction of the Harley 603 Ms. See also Janet Backhouse, "The Making of the Harley Psalter;" Francis Wormald, *English Drawings of the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*; Richard Gameson, "The Anglo-Saxon Artists of the Harley 603 Psalter," *Journal of the British Archaeological Asociation* 143 (1990): 29-48, and "The Romanesque Artist of the Harley 603 Psalter," English Manuscript Studies 4 (1993); Judith

Duffy, "The Inventive Group of Illustrations in the Harley Psalter;" Thomas Ohlgren, *Anglo-Saxon Textual Illustration* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute-Western Michigan UP, 1992); and Richard W. Pfaff, "Eadui Basan, Scriptorium Princeps?" *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the Harlaxton Symposium* Harlaxton Medieval Studies 2 (Stamford: Watkins, 1992).

[9] For example, Backhouse claims that "it is surely clear that so lavish an undertaking could hardly have been embarked upon solely at the whim of the scriptorium" (98). Noel and Backhouse suggest a connection with archbishop Æthelnoth. Gameson beleives it functioned as a status symbol. Hasler suggests that it was begun for Æthelred and then intended for Cnut. "Zu zwei Darstellungen aus der ältesten Kopie des Utrecht-Psalters, British Library Codex Harleianus 603," *Zeitschrift für Kenstgeschichte* 44 (1981): 317-39. Gameson points out that even the non-literate might collect books to be read aloud to them by someone else (56-57).

[10] For example, Boniface writes to his good friend Eadburga to ask her to copy for him "cum auro epistolas domini mei, sancti Petre apostoli, ad honorem et reverentiam sanctoarum scriptaurarum ante oculos carnalium in praedicando" *S Bonifatii et Lille Espistolae.* E. Dummler, ed. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae,* III, vi. 1892 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1957, 286). St. Edith of Wilton, the daughter of King Edgar, is renowned for her many accomplishments including spirituality, music, learning, painting, and calligraphy, Goscelin, *De Sancta Editha virgine et abbatiss,* A. Willmart, ed., "La Legend de ste Edith en prose et vers par le moine Goscelin." *Analecta Bollandiana* 56 (1938): 68-9. Celia Sisam, in her introduction to the Vercelli Homily facsimile, suggests that this manuscript was the product of a nunnery: The Vercelli Book: A Late Tenth-Century Manuscript Containing Prose and Verse, Vercelli Biblioteca Capitolare CXVII. EEMF 19 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, Allen and Unwin, 1976): 44.

[11] For detailed descriptions of liturgical practice see Æthelwold, *Regularis Concordia Anglicae nationis monachorum sanctimonialumque: The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation.* Ed. and trans. Thomas Symons (New York: Oxford

UP, 1953); Sally Roper, *Medieval English Benedictine Liturgy: Studies in the Formation, Structure, and Content of the Monastic Votive Office*, c. 950-1540. (New York: Garland, 1993), and Andrew Hughes, *Medieval Manuscripts for Mass and Office: A Guide to Their Organization and Terminology, 2nd ed.* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1996).

[12] All Psalm numbers follow the Vulgate numbering. Verse numbers follow the verse capitals in the manuscript and sometimes differ from conventional verse numbering.

[13] For example, the Eadui Psalter (BL, Arundel MS 155), written and probably illustrated by Eadui Basan contains an illustration in which a monk believed to be Eadui prostrates himself beneath St. Benedict's feet (f.133). BL Cotton MS. Titus D XXVI has an illustration where the donor, a Winchester monk named Ælfwine, is at the feet of St. Peter (f. 19v). Both of these manuscripts are contemporary with the Harley Psalter. However Judith of Flanders is thought to be the owner of the Gospel book which contains her picture (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS. 709, fol. 105v).

[14] "Whoever recites the words of a psalm seems to be repeating his own words, to be singing in solitude words composed by himself; it does not seem to be another speaking or explaining what he takes up and reads. It is as though he were speaking from his own person, such is the nature of the words he utters. He seems to be expressing the kind of language used as if spoken from the heart. He seems to offer words to God." Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms* , trans. P.G. Walsh, 3 vols. Ancient Christian Writers 51 (New York: Paulist, 1990) 41.

[15] All halftone illustrations are from the Harley Psalter and are used by permission of the British Library.

[16] "Proclaim with me the greatness of the Lord, and let us exalt his name in turn. Taste and see how sweet the Lord is." (All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.)

[17] "Idols of the Gentiles"

[18] "The dead will not praise you, O Lord, nor will any of those who go down to Hell."

[19] "Under you people will fall"

[20] "...advance prosperously, and reign, because of truth and gentleness and justice; and your right hand will direct your course wonderfully."

[21] Although like Latin, Old English uses grammatical gender, neither is one hundred percent grammatical. The representation of the figures as female is unlikely to be coincidence.

[22] "The daughters of kings have delighted in your glory. The queen stood on your right hand, in golden clothing; enveloped in colored garments. Hear, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear; and forget your people and your father's house; because the king has longed for the sight of you, for he is the Lord your God, and they shall adore him. And the daughters of Tyre with gifts, all the rich among the people shall implore your countenance. All the glory of the daughter of kings is within, in golden threads, enveloped with colored garments. After her virgins shall be brought to the king; her neighbors shall be brought to you. They shall be brought with gladness and rejoicing; they shall be brought into the temple of the king."

[23] "Behold as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters, and as the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes on the Lord our God, until he has mercy on us."

[24] "As a child that is weaned is towards his mother, so there is recompense in my soul."

[25] "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity."

[26] "May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow."

[27] "They parted my garments among them; and they cast lots over my clothing."

[28] "For you are the one who has drawn me out of the womb; my hope from the breasts of my mother."

[29] "Fear him all the seed of Israel."

[30] "Behold he has been in labor with injustice; he has conceived sorrow, and given birth to iniquity."

[31] This is different from its use on Old English where the word was much less firmly attached to the male gender.

[32] Although the author was traditionally believed to be David, he speaks in the non-gendered first person, making the verbal text more ambiguous.

[33] "Who is there dwelling in England who knows not how *Eadgar* advanced and protected the kingdom of God, that is, God's church, whether with spiritual or worldly good, by all his influence?...After he became duly ordered himself, he began zealously to arrange monasteries far and wide throughout his kingdom, and to set up a service of God. ...In some places also he established mynchens, and entrusted them to his consort Ælfþrið that at every need she should help them. He ever investigated, himself, about the right conversation of monks, and kindly advised her to imitate him, and in the same way see to the mynchens." "Edgar Establishes Monasteries," *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England* ed. Oswald Cockayne, Vol 35 of Reruim Brittanicarum 1857. (Reprint London:Kraus, 1965) 441.

[34] "May he be mindful of all your sacrifices; and may your whole burnt offering be made fat."

[35] "O lord, save the king."

[36] "Some extol chariots and some horses; but we will glorify the Lord our God. They are bound, and have fallen; but we are risen, and are standing upright."

[37] Wulfstan's teacher, Ervenius is reported to haved entrusted a sacramentary and psalter him, and later to have given the sacramentary to Cnut and the Psalter to Emma. Quoted in T. A. Heslop, "The Production of De Luxe manuscripts and the Patronage of King Cnut and Queen Emma," *Anglo-Saxon England* 19 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 159.

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